

MISS

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BY RUPERT HUGHES

1st. Ed. 1⁰⁰

MISS 318

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*A Story in Season
and Out of Season*

By
RUPERT HUGHES



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Foreword

“**I**S there any excuse for one more Christmas story?”

“Perhaps—if one could find something that has been left unsaid.”

“But surely nothing has been left unsaid?”

“The truth, perhaps.”

“The truth?—about Christmas! Would anybody care to read it?”

“Perhaps; if anybody cared enough to write it.”

“But would anybody dare to publish it?”

“Probably not.”

“That sounds interesting! What nobody would care to read and nobody would dare to publish, ought to be well worth writing.”

Foreword

Some such internal debate brought about the writing of this story ; its first aim to be an interesting story, its ambition to be also a truthful story.

The result was amazing. The first editor that saw it published it. Its appearance in *The Saturday Evening Post* brought forth a multitude of responses, all of them warm with approval. There came even anonymous letters full of God-bless-you's—and anonymous letters are not usually full of God-bless-you's. Many, many people have asked for Miss 318 in book form, so here it is ; begging whoso reads the story of these victims of Christmas as it is, to remember throughout that it is in no sense at all a protest against the beautiful festival itself, but a plea for Christmas as it ought to be.

New York.

R. H.

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EVERY DAY IS BARGAIN DAY AT

THE MAMMOTH

But there are bargains within bargains. To-day, between the hours of 9 A. M. and 4 P. M., we shall sell 1000 corsets—only 1000 corsets, mind you! But they are the

Famous C. Q. D. Corsets

Self-reducing, first aid to the superplump; the last word in elegance for the perfect or for the improvable figure. Medium and high bust; straight hip effects; four hose-supporters. You have always paid \$3.25 for C. Q. D.'s. For seven hours you may have one of the 1000 masterpieces of the corsetière's art for

\$1.97

You will not believe it unless you see it.
You will not see it unless you come early.

Miss 318

I

AT BAY

THAT morning the rhapsodist who composed the passionate advertisements of the Mammoth Shop, sang the song on the opposite page. The clarion cry, reverberating through the newspaper megaphones, roused the women of the city to a frenzy difficult for the masculine mind to understand. And they responded as the rats of Hamelin when the pied piper piped—fat, lean and all the betweens; rich and poor and middlings; by elevated, surface, subway, afoot, ahansom, ataxi, and even acrutch.

Like a tiny coral atoll in an angry sea the corset kiosk breasted the shocks of the ravening women. They billowed and eddied about it in a solid yet fluid mass. A mingled hunger for beauty and for bargain drove them on like a storm.

Over the kiosk was the red-lettered legend :

*As Advertised ! Special ! \$1.97 !!
To-day Only !!!*

The sales-nymph of that grotto stood underneath the placard, as if it were she that was for sale for \$1.97.

She was known to her superiors as "No. 318," known to the regular patrons of the store as "that vinegar-cruet," and known to the few who knew her uncommercially as Miss Lisette Mooney. Her parents called

her "Liz," but she preferred Lisette ; and if you wished to please her you would call her last name "Moo-nay" —with the stress on the "nay."

Miss Mooney's knowledge and opinion of that sweet multitude summed up as "American womanhood" had been founded chiefly on her experience with it as it surged past or stagnated around her counter. She had read something about saintly mothers, gentle-souled wives and soft-spoken sweethearts in the engaging romances of Miss Laura Jean Libbey and Company ; but she had decided that, if women of good manners and amiable motive really exist outside of books, they had never chanced to deal with her.

These women could be womanly elsewhere ; it was their headlong pas-

sions for exquisite things meeting within the narrow walls of financial limitation that made a Niagara of every bargain-rush. Miss Mooney was not far-sighted enough to realize and forgive them any more than her customers were magnanimous enough to blame her peevishness on her fatigue, or her affectations of elegance on a pathetic desire to improve the lowly shabbiness of her origin. She was a self-made lady.

Women, as Miss Mooney knew them in dull hours or unfrequented aisles, were creatures who dawdled about asking fool questions, seeking impossible combinations, haggling like misers, buying neither wisely nor well, and mingling odious vanity with heartless rapacity.

Women, as Miss Mooney knew them

in action, were horrible to contemplate. The bare announcement in the newspapers of a reduction of a few pennies in the usual price of any article was sufficient to bring down all the females in New York in one ruinous flood, as if a dam had burst. Every counter became a small Johnstown, assailed with frenzied greed, shocking manners and raucous, snarling voices.

Miss Mooney's acquaintance with men was limited. Only occasionally a well-dressed male wandered into the Mammoth, usually in tow of some woman who bullied him and nagged him pitilessly. Such men as came alone went so anxiously to their destinations and knew so exactly what they wanted, and hastened away so precipitately, that they were merely tantalizing.

Miss Mooney, knowing little of the male world, believed that ideal men existed, that they were numerous in the great realm outside the Mammoth. She longed for experience. She felt that she could not die without knowing, loving and being loved by somebody who was somebody—a broker, for instance, or a painter, a duke, or an actor. But she could devise no way of meeting any of these, and she was so dog-tired when the shop closed that she hardly cared.

Meanwhile, to keep in practice, she encouraged the attentions of such men as swam within her ken during the day. She was gracious to the floor-walkers; she was chatty with the hearty lads in the hardware department or the polished youth in the haberdashery. Her manner with

At Bay

these was as different from her manner with her own sex as honey is different from quinine.

She particularly cultivated one of the floor-walkers, Mr. Percival Sterling, who boarded on her street. He was rather afraid of her, and the jealous minxes along the other counters said that she had him hypnotized. But his nerves were usually so shattered after a day's buffeting among the shoppers that he was not easy to reillusionize of an evening. Still, Miss Mooney had hopes of him. Better a floor-walker on the arm than two dukes in a book.

It was marvellous to note the change that came over her when Mr. Sterling sauntered past the counter where she stood. It was :

“Nice morning this morning, Mr.

Stoiling!" or "Was you to the Harmony Club ball last night? I would 'a' went, only m' sister Goitrood hadda go and get attackted with lumbago," or "How's your cough this mornin', Poicival?"

Everybody else, including all the floor-walkers, dreaded her sharp tongue and her caustic insolence. She would have been discharged years before, but nobody quite dared discharge Miss Mooney. She did make sales; she did keep her accounts straight; she knew the stock; she was efficient. But she was hateful; and the women who bought from her hated her, bought things just to spite her—just "to show her!" Still, they bought.

It was easy to get away purchaseless from pleasanter saleswomen. But to take 318's time and energy and to

At Bay

walk away, with an idle "I was just looking around" or a casual "I'll probably be back later," was to invite a barbed glance that went through and through one's very spine like a scroll-saw.

So Miss Mooney kept her job because, as one of the partners, Mr. Poswalsky, said to the other, Mr. Hirschberg :

"After all, 318 sells the stuff. Look at her stubs once! We ain't running a etiquette store. Ladies get mad at her, but they come back when we mark something low. You better give her a call-down, but don't let her get loose."

So now, on this epoch-making day in corset-history when C. Q. D.'s were quoted at \$1.97, the kiosk was assigned to 318. She glowed within it like a

flame in a crater. Her hair, originally of a brickish hue, this season was of a sulphurous tinge and her manner was one of implied brimstone.

Very grimly she regarded the rabid horde about her. Very sarcastically she withered those who comported themselves as if they were conferring a favour on the store by buying. She upheld the dignity of the Mammoth and made it distinctly understood that the reduction in price was actually a charitable largess to the needy. She knew that no other attitude could so reduce a purchaser to that state of helpless rage where one's only way of asserting one's self-respect is to buy and be off.

Dozens of corpulent women were already reducing themselves and one another by their athletic efforts to



She stifled a yawn with a delicate gesture before she deigned to make out the necessary literature.

wedge to the front at the same time. When they brandished their selections and their change in her face, all at once, she tilted her nose a little more and drawled :

“One at a time, please. What was you saying, m’m?” She had even compressed the necessary “madam” into a mere hum—a murmurous double M.

“I am going to faint if I don’t get out,” panted one scarlet shopper. “It’s an outrage to be so slow.”

“Was you addressing me, m’m?” 318 mused; and staring through the too, too solid flesh as if it were a pane of glass she became a little slower, and stifled a yawn with a delicate gesture before she deigned to make out the necessary literature and hoist the parcel basket to its chute.

“I’ll report you to the floor-walker if you ignore me further,” shrieked a purple-faced dowager, frantic to be at home and don the sylph-producing envelope.

The mention of the floor-walker brought a jaded smile to Miss Moon-ey’s lips. She knew that no mere male would dare venture among these maudlin bargain-bacchantes.

With the dignity of a butterfly wrenching itself loose from the chrysalis, or a soul prying free from its material chains, she set her hands on her hips and, as if she were quite alone, writhed upward in her tight stays. Then she sighed luxuriously and, leaving the threatener to smother in her own rage, tossed an airy remark over her head to the high-throned cash-girl across the aisle :

At Bay

“Say, Constance, the manners some of these dames hasn’t got would give you a pain, wouldn’t they? Soitain poissons seem to think a goil’s got a hunderd hands.” Then turning back to her quivering victim: “I ain’t a spider, m’m; and there’s other ladies been waiting here longer ’n you have. You might tell the floor-walker how you squeezed in ahead of your toin. That lady under your elbow was here hours before you was.”

This turned the tide of sentiment against the interloper and she blenched before the glare of the other looters. She was almost moved to yield the place she had usurped—almost.

In a hush of awe the cowed rabble awaited the rcyal whim of 318 and, without further complaint, accepted the parcels as donations and backed

out one after another, hugging the doubly precious coats of armour to their exuberant torsos.

The unfortunate penitent who had threatened to invoke the floor-walker was still longing for the steel-ribbed caisson that should give her the contour of a Phryne, when a fresh tidal wave of mænads, disgorged from some street car, smote the crowd. In the confusion, a human eddy swept a frightened young woman forward to the kiosk and deposited her on the ledge like a body thrown ashore by a wave. At the sight of the new-come face, as pretty as its plebeian limitations permitted, Miss Mooney's rigour relaxed in a smile of cordiality.

"Well, for Gawsay!"—she had condensed this strenuous expletive into a mere exhalation—"if it ain't Moitle

At Bay

Crilley ! How joo ever woik your way through this push ? ” She hailed the change-girl on the crag opposite : “ Say, Constance ; look who’s here.”

The change-girl waved a hand full of bills.

“ Welcome to our city, Myrt.”

Miss Mooney shook her by the hand. “ Say, I ain’t sor you for a month of Sundays. Livin’ in the same ’partment house, o’ course we never meet. That’s N’ York all over. How are you, anyway ? How’s your mother ’n’ fath’r and your little sist’r ? ’S your brother out of the hospital yet ? ”

“ Yes—oh, we’re pretty well. I’m all right,” was the girl’s comprehensive answer. She looked about at the glowering, many-eyed hostility surrounding her and gasped : “ But say,

Liz—Lisette, how do you ever stand this?"

"This?" said 318, indicating the syndicated wrath shoving corsets at her. "Oh, this is nothing—simpluh a part of the day's woik. Just wait till next week. 'Then you'll see some crowd. The whole store'll be like this is only woise."

She paused for breath and a score of voices broke in with a shrapnel of questions: "Would you be kind enough to tell me——" "Can't you have this wrapped——" "I'd like this sent to——" "Do these come with double-length laces——" "Do you have this in any other shades except——" "Are we supposed to stand here all day and listen to your——"

No. 318 swept the mutineers with a scornful glance and continued her

===== *At Bay* =====

chat, flinging occasional parenthetical answers to the splenetic shoppers.

“Where you woikin’ now, Moitle? —No, m’m; we cannot exchange anything.—Still got your place in that swell milliner’s?—Yes, m’m; the price is plainly marked.—No, m’m. Yes, m’m. —I said where you woikin’ at now?”

“No place,” said Myrtle. “Wisht I could get a p’sition here. I need a job something awful.”

“You woik here!—That corset’s the biggest we carry in the C. Q. D. Too bad. We have no call for them extra sizes.—Why, you’d last about fi’ days here, Moitle.—Well, m’m, if you don’t like those kind of hose-supporters you can cut ’em off.—This job would be too strenuous for a wisp like you.—What’s that? We soitainly cannot. Try a short and stout.”

The young girl was emboldened to speak above the surf:

“ Oh, I could stand it, I guess, when I got used to it. And I need it. Father’s had hard luck lately; and mother’s back’s gave out on her, so she can’t scrub floors as good as she used to could.”

Miss Mooney clicked her sympathy. “Ts-ts-ts! I guess George M. had it right when he said, Life’s a funny proposish.—Yes, m’m; you sew ’em right inside the corset.—Well, Moitle, if you gotta go to woik, maybe I could fix it for yuh. A soittain party—Can’t you see I’m waitin’ on this lady?—as I started to say, a soittain party is takin’ me to a vawdville house to-night. He has infloonce. I’ll sudjest it to him.—No, m’m. There ain’t any lor compellin’ you to take it if you don’t like

===== *At Bay* =====

it—Is that so!—— What you want, Moitle?—one of these C. Q. D.'s? Say, save your money. Whyn't you go out in your own figure?—whilst you got one. Some dames is built like battle-ships and —— No, m'm; I was not alloodin' to you. Oh, very well!—Well, s'long, Moitle. You're entirely welcome. See you to-morra. I may have nooze for you. Come again when you can't stay so long. Give my regards to your folks.—What's that? The price is on the card just over your head. People are s'posed to be able to read. What's that? Your change? Well, I ain't got it. Soon's it comes back you'll get it. What's that? Excuse me, but kinely do not handle the goods if not intending to poichase. Yes, m'm. No, m'm. No, m'm. Yes, m'm. What's that?"

II

OFF DUTY

WHEN the thousandth C. Q. D. had been snatched up at four o'clock, Miss Mooney dragged her various fatigues, mental and bodily, to the lunch-room for a "san'wich and a cuppa tea." Then she was assigned to another department, where she sold what she called "lonjery." Into the Eleusinian mysteries of that realm we are forbidden to follow.

At six o'clock the Mammoth closed and she joined the line before the coat-room. A little later, on the street, she was as haughty as her idea of a duchess. On the sardine-packed street

===== *Off Duty* =====

car, a man, evidently from out of town, gave her his seat, under the apparent impression that she was probably there because her automobile had broken down. She thanked him with majesty, but she sat gracelessly like a working woman, almost too weary to open her *Evening Journal* and palpitate with "Beetrus Fairfax" over the ethical and etiquettical problems of life. She had been on her feet all day and there were four flights of stairs to climb before she was home.

Once she entered the crowded pigeonhole that was her family's domain, her lofty manners fell from her like a cloak. She released her aching feet from the straining leather and caressed them with pitying tenderness. Then she slumped into a chair and, leaning her head on one hand in utter fag, ate

what was shoved at her and cared no whit that the service was not according to the standards of that great dream-world she called "Fi'th Aven-yuh."

After the dinner she helped with the dish-washing and cleared the versatile table in the versatile cell that served as drawing-room, library, living-room dining-room, butler's pantry and kitchen.

Then she began a new toilet and put on the finery she had made herself, with pathetic mimicry of the "swell push" as she knew it. Eventually the bell in the kitchen announced the advent of a caller in the entrance-hall four flights below. She drove her hat-pins through her amazing hat and the haycock of her more amazing hair, and sped down the stairs, gathering up the

===== *Off Duty* =====

hauteur that had fallen from her as she climbed.

Mr. Percival Sterling was waiting. His gallantry was not equal to those four flights. His eyes popped at 318's grandeur, and he took the apex of her elbow in his hand with as close an approximation to tenderness as a timid palm could well transmit to so sharp a bone.

Miss Mooney flushed with joy ; hope shuddered through her. Mr. Sterling was reputed to be the proud recipient of twenty-two dollars a week and to be the solid possessor of that Gibraltar in poverty—"money in the bank."

She inly determined to fascinate this handsome Cræsus and devote her future evenings to coaxing him into a proposal. She would give up her imaginings of infatuating a mystic mil-

lionaire and lean henceforth upon a tangible floor-walker. Suddenly she flushed to realize that the tune she was humming—the tune that made her feet forget their leaden weariness—was none other than the Wed'n March by Mandelbaum.

III

IN CLOVER

THANKS to the democratic nature of male costume and the mechanical genius of certain Titanic tailors, Mr. Sterling had swathed his graceful form in an eighteen-dollar suit on which a baronet could hardly have improved at as many guineas.

Thanks to the genius of certain other mechanical artists, he provided his companion and himself with box seats at a thrilling entertainment for a total price of fifty cents. The menu was moving pictures, with interludes of vaudeville. Miss Mooney draped herself across the brass rail of the

box as proudly as a countess at the
“Metterpolitan Op’ra.”

After the show Mr. Sterling did the handsome. He stood treat at an ice-cream-soda fountain. As Miss Mooney daintily absorbed a sundae, with hot chocolate and walnuts poured over vanellar ice-cream, she was moved to observe with happy irony :

“I’m just heart-broken over the store being closed to-morra on account the holiday. I just hate to sleep late—don’t you?”

Mr. Sterling blushed at the intimacy of the suggestion as he murmured :

“Thanksgiving is a nice day, but there is always one objection to it.”

She poised a luscious spoon-load in front of her smile : “I’ll be the goat—what’s the answer?”



She poised a luscious spoon-load in front of her smile.

In Clover

He sighed. "It's a warning that Christmas is coming."

Her spoon fell back into the chalice as she wailed: "Christmus! Oh, why did you mention the hor'ble woid? Everything was very pleasant up till now."

On the way home he was astonishingly cordial—for him. He clung to her elbow. He laughed at her wit. He came as near to declaring his love as a man could without saying a word about it, and finally he spoke of the loneliness of his life. Lisette felt that he was all but won. She played a desperate high card:

"Was you intending to eat your Thanksgiving dinner with friends or at home?"

"At the boarding-house," he moaned.

"Well, say, whyn't you come over

and set in with us and eat your dinner informal—just *on fameel* as the saying is? ”

“ It would be lovely,” said Mr. Sterling. “ At what hour? ”

“ We dine in the middle the day on Sundays and holidays,” she said with lofty carelessness. Under the uplift of this welcome the lonely floor-walker bade her good-night with a sincere if not a venturesome cordiality.

IV

“ON FAMEEL”

AS she climbed the stairs she was planning to assail Mr. Sterling's heart via his stomach. She would show him that she was as good a cook as she was a saleslady. She tiptoed into the dark home and began to doze before she had taken off her things. She was asleep almost before she had crept into the narrow bed where her sister Gertrude already slumbered.

Gertrude had long realized that Christmas was coming, for she had been working overtime in a box factory, making up pasteboard cases for the holiday trade. Gertrude was not

strong. She sat all day and most of the evening in a low, close room, smearing paste. The paste grew sour and the smell of it sickened her so that she could hardly eat even the cold lunch she took with her or the hot supper for which the company generously allowed the workers fifteen cents a day. Gertrude's skin looked like her own paste. And she should have been beautiful.

In the next room the next younger and the youngest sisters slept. The younger sister was Claryce, originally Clara, who was paid all of five dollars a week for merely loitering in a candy store from 8 A. M. to 8 P. M. The youngest sister, Bridget, had not yet accepted a position. She was only five years old; she was too young even to have changed her given name.

In the room beyond, the twins were two more dead logs of sleep—Pat and Nat. Pat was a messenger boy of the usual learned type. Nat had been a messenger boy, but he had fought too hard and too often. And now for some three months he had been earning sixty cents a week by spending ten or twelve hours a day pasting coloured pictures of Santa Claus on Christmas boxes. Nat knew that Christmas was coming. He had his opinion of Santa Claus and expressed it. It would hardly quote well here. Nat had been a messenger boy.

On a cot in this same room was the seven-year-old Michael. He was not working, except for an occasional foray into the newspaper business.

In the last room of all slept the author and authoress of this generous

and industrious flock : Mr. Dennis Mooney, an able expressman, charioteer of a noble van ; and Mrs. Cordelia Mooney, deft seamstress, housekeeper and dictatrix of the family, except when the eldest daughter, Lisette, formerly Lizzie, was home from the shop.

Lisette had collected wages since she had reached the age of nine ; for she dated back of the most recent child-labour laws. She had surely earned the right to spell her given name as she pleased. But she had never gained the privilege of spelling her last name anything but Mooney. She thought that Mrs. Lisette Sterling would be “ a swell monaker.” She wondered if she couldn’t make it. She wondered also if she could live through another Christmas ordeal at the Mammoth.

Every Christmas for five years she

had made herself a present of a solemn resolution that she would never face another Yuletide from behind a counter. And here she was again—still unmarried, still under the lash and yoke of necessity.

Mr. Sterling had held her hand and squeezed it hard to-night. Perhaps—who could tell? Give her only a few more evenings in his society and she might convince him that she was a bargain worth nabbing.

V

HER GUEST

INSTEAD of sleeping as late as a sultana the next morning Miss Mooney was up with the milkman. All the long forenoon of her holiday she toiled harder than at the Mammoth. Her poor feet had no cause for giving thanks. She drove them up and down the stairs again and again, along the streets to the delicatessen and the fruit store, and even to the florist's for a pathetic flower or two to grace the board for her prospective bridegroom. Yet, for all her extravagance, she was discouraged at the result. She dreaded the opinion the aristocratic floor-walker must form of a

Her Guest

home which even she found harrowingly unrefined.

While she was cooking the meal and adorning the table and setting the house to rights, she had the rest of the family flying in all directions. Between commands she gave lessons in table deportment. With all the irreverence of American juniority, she scolded her meek and blunderful parents.

“ Say, paw, wrastle another scuttle o’ coal, will you ? When you come to the table to-day I ask you, as one last favour to me, to keep your coat on ; and if you’ll wear a collar I’ll thank yuh to my dying day.” Paw promised.

“ And, maw, will you oblige me by rollin’ your sleeves down when you begin to eat ? And, if it ain’t too much trouble, would you mind cuttin’

out that knife-swallerin' act you do? If they's anything gets on the noives of a jepman of refinement it is to see a lady pokin' a knife into her face. Stick to the fork, maw—stick to the fork, for Gawsay—just this once."

The father ventured a protest: "Seems to me, Lizzie ——"

"And, for Gawsay, don't call me Lizzie. Either call me Lisette or throw somep'n at me."

The family took its orders like an awkward squad receiving technical instruction it could neither understand nor perform, and Lisette regretted that she had ever risked a guest.

Everybody was thoroughly miserable and when Mr. Sterling arrived he kept it unanimous. The commonplaceness of the conversation was as depressing as its delivery was elaborate. A congress



It was Claude Duval who answered: "Oh, no, no, I thank you, I would not wish for any."

Her Guest

of prime ministers could hardly have laboured for more dignity.

It was with all the flourish of a costume play that Lisette commanded : “ Maw, whyn’t you pass paw Mr. Stoiling’s plate so’s to give um s’more goose ? ”

It was Claude Duval who answered : “ Oh, no, no. I thank you. I would not wish for any.”

It was the Lady of Lyons who entreated : “ Some of the tomattus, then ? ”

It was Sir Hubert Stanley who replied : “ Thanks, I never use tomattus.”

It was Lady Jane who sighed : “ Why, you don’t eat enough to keep a boid alive.”

Lisette thought it becoming in a hostess to deprecate her hospitality, and she was saying :

“ I guess, Mr. Stoiling, you was ex-

pectin' toikey, and I had my hopes up too; but with toikeys sellin' at a million dollars a pound I couldn't quite reach it."

"I dearly love goose," said Mr. Sterling amiably.

To Lisette's dismay her mother, who had pursued a safe and sane policy of silence, was moved to speech.

"Goose is a heap better'n nothin'," she insisted, deftly swashing her coffee round in the saucer. "We ought to be thankful to have it."

This resignation did not suit brother Pat, who was already a promising social disruptionist.

"Aw, whatta we gotta be t'ankful fer?" he growled. "We're all woikin' like a gang of convicks whilst dem rich guys is swellin' round in ottermobiles an' eatin' deir toikeys t'ree times a day.

===== *Her Guest* =====

Say, wat's de uset of havin' T'anksgivin', annyway, when all you gotta be t'ankful fer is dat yer goose ain't a lemon?"

His mother, made patient by a lifetime among the always poor, gazed at him sadly :

"Always remember, Patsy, that in this here world there's always somebuddy worse off'n what you are."

"Well, dat's a lot of comfort, I don't t'ink. But where are dey? Where are dey?" he demanded.

"In this very house. Right overhead, if you want to know. I seen Mrs. Crilley the mornin' and she was wringin' her hands and cryin' because she smelt our goose cookin'; and she says, 'It's lucky you are, Mrs. Mooney,' she says, 'to be livin' so high; we ain't got no meat at all!' s'she. It's tur-

rible. Here, Claryce, run up-stairs with the leavin's of this fowl—unless Mr. Stoiling wants some more."

Mr. Sterling disclaimed any desire to deprive the starving of a meal.

Lisette gave a start of remorse. "Wait a minute, Claryce," she said. "Say, Mr. Stoiling, that reminds me. Moitle Crilley was saying to me yestiddy she'd like a p'sition in the Mammoth. Knowin' they'd be needin' a lot of extry hands for the Christmus rush, I thought maybe she'd have a chance; and, knowin' how well you stand with the foim, I told her I'd speak to you about it."

"Why, yes," said Mr. Sterling gallantly. "I should be glad to recommend any friend of yours."

"Fine!" cried Lisette. "Say, Claryce, when you take up that goose bring Moitle back with you."



So exquisite a creature as the timid statuette of pathos on
the door sill.

Her Guest

While they waited Miss Mooney described her protégée with enthusiasm and pleaded her cause. When Myrtle arrived at the door her beauty pleaded for itself with an eloquence Mr. Sterling could not resist.

He thought he had never seen so exquisite a creature as the timid statuette of pathos on the door-sill. Of none too robust a nature, he felt that here at last was a woman who would lean on him and find him strong. Miss Mooney was nice—very nice—but so very independent. It did him proud to appear as the rescuer of somebody from something; in fact, when Myrtle, encouraged by his wide-eyed admiration, told him of the family's dire estate, with rent three months overdue, grocer and butcher threatening to cut off credit, and idleness disabling the whole house-

hold, a wild inspiration came to him to rescue the entire lot.

In his own domain Mr. Sterling was a man of resource and decision.

“ Let me see, Miss Crilley,” he pondered aloud impressively ; “ perhaps I can find a place for all of you. Your father, you say, is a good carpenter? We could put him in our packing and shipping department. Your mother, I believe you said, is an excellent scrub-lady? I can find room for her, I’m sure, if she will consent to night work. You, of course, can count on a place in one of the sales departments where the work is not too difficult. You have brothers, perhaps? ”

“ Two brothers, sir ; and two sisters. My brother John—he’s older’n I am, but he’s got a job. He’s a mail-carrier, but he isn’t any help because he got

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married soon's he got his uniform. My next brother is Jimmie; he's fifteen."

"He could probably be a bin-boy. And your sisters?"

"There's Alice and Maude. Alice is fourteen, but Maude is only twelve."

"Alice could be a cash-girl," said the Napoleonic Sterling; "but Maude—I'm afraid the child-labour law would forbid our using her."

"Oh, but maw can make a affidavit that she's fourteen! She's done that before."

"Well, of course, as a conscientious man I could not advise that; but if your mother wishes to take the responsibility I have no way of proving her affidavit false. We might place little Maudie as a gatherer."

Myrtle was fairly dancing with rap-

ture. Nothing would do but that Mr. Sterling should come up and explain his bounty in person. Such an entrance in the guise of a wholesale deliverer would have tempted a stronger man than Mr. Percival Sterling. Excusing himself—"for just a moment, please"—he vanished in Myrtle's wake.

The Mooneys, seeing their guest of honour translated aloft by their neighbour, gazed at one another dismayed. Lisette bit her lip in vexation and anxiety.

Pat spoke up first: "Say, dat Stoiling guy is goin' to adopt de whole dam family. Better watch out, sis, or Moitle'll steal him off you. I seen her give him de goo-goo eye. Shall I go up and bring him back for you?"

Lisette had just pride enough left to

Her Guest

retort : " Long as it don't consoin you, Pat, you'd oblige me by keeping your head shut. If I need a messenger I'll ring fer one."

Nobody else dared speak at all and the family sat breathless, dreading the possibility of seeing Lisette's beau kidnapped and all that feast and formality wasted. Lisette did not take the expense of the banquet into account, but she had no lovers to waste and her young hope was writhing with infantile paralysis.

It was long and it seemed longer before Mr. Sterling returned. Myrtle returned with him. She was leaning on his arm and she showed a proprietary interest in him. She sat down and stayed as long as he stayed, and the conversation was all of her own direction. It chiefly concerned her new

duties in the Mammoth. Mr. Sterling described them to her in great detail, with an occasional side remark to Lisette.

As Pat remarked to Nat: "We give dem Crilleys our goose, and now dey're pinchin' our gander."

VI

WEARY FEET

A COLOSSAL Santa Claus published an enormous smile from his station in the rotunda of the Mammoth Shop. Save for his gigantic size he was the usual fat-cheeked, rosy-nosed, snowy-whiskered, balloon-bellied old rogue, with the usual pack of gifts on his back. Around his pedestal his festival was preparing.

The Christmas season was now in full swing. The holiday numbers of the magazines had already lost their novelty on the stands. The sidewalks were packed with shoppers. The curbs were fringed with toy-merchants. On every corner a Salvation Army Kriss

Kringle shivered and pleaded for pennies. There had been one or two flurries of snow, and everybody was hoping for a white Christmas.

It was some days since the Crilley family had been recruited entire into the service of the Mammoth, along with a small army of other deputies enlisted to appease the increasing crowds. Every day the aisles grew more impacted. Every day the problems of display, sale and delivery became more difficult and more pressing. Every day it grew harder to spare a single hand for a single moment. Every day the tension increased.

It was three o'clock one afternoon before Miss Mooney dared attempt to escape for her luncheon, such as it was. In the restaurant she found Myrtle Crilley crumpled on a chair and ashen

===== *Weary Feet* =====

with exhaustion. The veteran's heart warmed to the newcomer, but it was Lisette's way to disguise her beautiful sentiments under an acidulous manner :

"Whattaya eatin', dearie? Ice-cream and a ham san'wich! Whyn't you have some sense about your food?"

"I'm too tired even for this," the girl moaned. "I got to hurry back too."

"It's fierce the way they treat us goils," Miss Mooney snapped. "When I begun to get faint I says to that tall, blond floor-walker—Peebles his name is—I says to him, 'I gotta get a bite of somep'n inside my belt or I do a flop right cheer and now.' And whattaya suppose he hands me? 'Oh, all right! but be quick about it,' he says. Whattaya know about that? The noive

of um ! Me standin' there on me pins, jugglin' bundles and change, and humourin' them female hyenas for seven hours straight, and he begrudges me me lunch ! I hadda make a nawful rush to get here this morning too. I just grabbed a cuppa cawfee and a fried egg at home at seven o'clock and run four blocks for a car, stood up all the way down and got to my kennel at eight sharp—and there I been all this time ; and when the floor begins to wobble and I says to him, ' Do I eat or do I die ? ' he has the front to slip me a hurry-up. Can you beat it ? ”

She was angrier than she was tired.

“ I was fifteen minutes late this morning,” said Myrtle, “ and they fined me. I've stood there on my feet ever since. My back is just absolutely broke ; and my feet—oh, heavens, my

Weary Feet

poor feet! I sat down two or three times, but every time I did a customer glared at me or a floor-walker motioned me to stand up."

"That's the way of it," said Miss Mooney. "The lor says they gotta have one seat for every three goils, but the floor-walkers thinks it spoils the looks of the store to see the cloiks settin' down. I feel sometimes as if I'd have to loin to stand on me head and wait on the folks with me toes, so's to give the soles of me feet a rest."

Myrtle went on with her own troubles:

"Finally I got so tired I wished I might die; I asked four different floor-walkers for permission to be excused for lunch, and not one of them would leave me go."

"How'd you manage? Sneak it

anyway?" Miss Mooney asked, with a dreary smile that faded to nothing as Myrtle explained:

"No; Mr. Sterling come by and I asked him, and he says: 'Why, certainly, Miss Crilley. You look awful tired.' Yes, he did. He's a turrible nice man, ain't he?"

"Turrible!" echoed Miss Mooney.

Then, with briskness, she gathered her aches and pains together. "Come along—it's back to the mines for ours."

"I don't think I can even step on my feet at all," whimpered Miss Crilley, and Miss Mooney forgot to be jealous. She picked her up and supported her out.

"Get busy, Moitle: don't lay down now. Cheer up—the woist is yet to come. Remember there's thousands and thousands of just as sore feet as

===== *Weary Feet* =====

yours doin' their woik just the same. My own Trilbies ain't singin' no psalms. Most of the extry commissions I make goes to the chiropodist. What kind of foot powder do you use? "

"I haven't used any."

"Well, you gotta get foot powder, whether you have face powder or not. I'll lend you a couple o' sprinkles of mine for to-day. That'll help some."

With this promise, Myrtle succeeded in hobbling from the restaurant. Just outside the door was the railed balcony of the rotunda.

VII

YULE THOUGHTS

A NOISE came up from the crowd like the menacing clamour of a sea. The two women paused to look down on the turmoil.

“Look at 'em!” said Miss Mooney. “If you was a stranger from Mars, or some of them foreign parts, and you come here and seen a sight like that, you'd say, ‘What are they all so mad about? Are they goin' to lynch somebody or are they fighting among themselves?’ Then, if anybody was to tell you, ‘Oh, no! they're gettin' ready for a religious celebration and they're just buyin' a few presents for each other to show their good-will and brotherly love,’ you'd say, ‘Come off the poich!

Yule Thoughts

You can't fool me; everybody down there hates everybody else and has moider in their hearts. Whyn't the police do something?' That's what you'd say if you hadn't been brung up on this."

Myrtle was content just to lean on the railing, too weary for philosophy. Miss Mooney thought on aloud. From their height they looked almost into the face of the towering Santa Claus.

"If that was a statue of Old Nick it would be more like what's goin' on below. Look at that big bluff—made out of paper-musshay and holler inside! For five years I've sor him, or one like him, put up there. He's always fat and he always grins; but he's the original con. man and I'd like to swat him in the map with a rollin'-pin.

"Down there it's always the same

old battle. If the shoppers wasn't so mean to us goils—and to each other—I'd get sorry for them. Some of the dames looks so tired, and they can't make up their minds what to buy or who to buy it for; and they take the money they can't afford and grab off a lot of stuff to give to somebody who don't want it, and in retoin they get a stack of junk they can't use. Wouldn't it frost you?

“Christmus means three weeks of infoinal misery for everybody and one long day of tryin' to look all to the merry when you're all to the mustard.”

Myrtle was moved to suggest: “It's nice for the childern, though.”

“Oh, yes—for the childern that gets the toys and the stummickache! But what about the childern that wraps up the toys and don't get any? And

Yule Thoughts

the messenger kids and the swarms of other wore-out childern that has to deliver the toys? But, even at that, the kids has their rights. I always give 'em what I can m'self. Oh, they useta be a nice idea about Christmus, but I guess it got lost in the wash! It's like boinin' down the house so's to make a pretty fire in the grate.

"Keep your eye on the crowds; and for every kind woid you hear spoke and every Christmassy thought you hear thunk I'll give you a nine-dollar bill.

"This morning a mother and a daughter hangs round my counter till I come near askin' 'em did they want to take a room by the week. They clawed and pawed and jawed—but nothin' doin' on the buy. Finally they toins on each other and the old dame

says, 'Gabrielle, if you don't decide what you want and let me know I'll never speak to you again!' And the daughter says, 'Mamma'—with the accent on the second 'ma'—you could see they was swells—'Mamma,' she says, 'I don't want a blamed thing except for you to go home and lay down; but before you go, for Gawd's sake tell me what you'd like for a Christmas present!'

"Then Mamma says, 'If you get me anything I'll scream'; and Gabrielle says, 'Let's not give each other nothin'.' She had some sense, that goil. But Mamma was consoivative and she says: 'We gotta give each other some-p'n. We just gotta. It would look so strange notta.' And they come back to my counter. They was still there when I ducked.

Yule Thoughts

“The whole store’s that way. The whole town’s one big lunatic asylum. Every December the whole world goes bughouse.”

If her tirade was bitter, was she not justified by bitter experience? If her spirit was not gentle, is the blame hers? or theirs—ours!—who have turned the most beautiful of holidays into a season of world-wide exhaustion, and have chosen the festival of the tender, the pitiful, the meek, the lowly Christ for a saturnalia of riot, cruelty, ostentation and waste? If the soul of the feast is ever to be restored to it, must it not prove itself first by showing mercy to the victims of its perversion?

Myrtle shuddered at Lisette’s sacrilege, but she was too feeble to defend the venerable rites. Miss Mooney, revelling in the luxury of escaping the

usual counter conversation for a while, preached on :

“It’s bad enough what the buyers suffer. But Christmus from the inside—well, just wait! If you last till Christmus Eve you’ll see sights that’ll make you wisht you was a Chinaman. This store will be like the battle of Gettysboig the last three days. They’re only skoimishin’ now. It’s ghassly, Moitle—it’s absolutely ghassly!”

With the dogged stubbornness of the overdriven, Myrtle persisted :

“Still it would be a pity to give up Christmas, I think.”

“ Well, you got another think comin’. If all this time and money and woik was spent on something useful, and spread over the year, it would give thousands of poor dubs jobs all the time, instead of grindin’ ’em to death



"This store will be like the battle of Gettysboig the last three days."

===== *Yule Thoughts* =====

for three weeks in the name of religion.

“ And keep on rememberin’ that this store is only one drop in the bucket, and you and me are only a couple o’ microbes. I’m Number 318 and you’re B 726. If you can imagine about a billion heads as feverish as yours and a billion feet as lame, and a billion tons of them achin’ backs, and a couple o’ billion mobs draggin’ sore feet and sore heads through the stores, spendin’ their dough foolish and to no poipose, you’ll get a line on Christmus as she really is. Take it from me, Christmus is a crime. They otta be a lor against it.”

And then one of the overseers ended the tirade with a gruff rebuke :

“ Say, do you ladies think you’re lolling on a recreation pier? ”

“ Why, Mr. Hoishboig,” said Miss

Mooney spunkily, “ ain’t we got a right to take a peek at the slaughter-house ? ”

But the junior partner, seeing it was Miss Mooney he had provoked, was gone. He was distracted enough with the effort to keep the stock replenished, the sales delivered and the prices aligned with the prices of rivals. He regretted the sufferings of his people as a general regrets the destruction of his troops ; but he must serve the whims of the public, and the public had gone mad.

VIII

AFTER DARK

SOMEHOW Myrtle Crilley lived through the ages until the store let its portcullis fall for the night, but the crew of the Mammoth did not go home. Behind the locked doors, and the curtains drawn back of the show-window splendour, the saleswomen were kept busy for hours, restoring order from the chaos, refurbishing the shelves and rearranging the stock for the morrow.

The expert Miss Mooney was one of the first to finish her duties. She passed the counter where Myrtle was still awkwardly fumbling with her own tasks. Other clerks had given the pretty maid a look or a word of sym-

pathy or advice—and passed by on the other side. Miss Mooney berated her for an ignoramus and a gawk, but paused to help her.

With arms that ached from lifting boxes and bolts from the shelves, and fingers that were cramped with overwork, she had time to help another.

She did it with a bad grace, but she got it done. That was Miss Mooney: sharp of tongue, but Samaritan of hand. Myrtle hated her for her bad temper, but accepted her aid and graciously consented to permit Miss Mooney to take her home. She fell asleep on Miss Mooney's shoulder in the street car.

It was nearly midnight when they reached their street. Myrtle limped miserably. Miss Mooney took her arm in her own aching arm and boosted her.

After Dark

Myrtle was crying and Miss Mooney was candidly disgusted.

"The worst of it is," said the forlorn girl, "that I've got to get up so early to reach the store on time to-morrow morning. I'm killing myself and what do I get out of it?—four dollars a week! And I've got to pay for two meals a day besides sixty cents for car-fare."

"Seventy cents," Miss Mooney corrected. "From now on we gotta show up Sundays too."

"Oh, great heavens! Take me to the cemetery and be done with it."

Miss Mooney laughed bitterly. "We ain't got time for funerals till after Christmas."

They hobbled on down the lonely, dark street. Abruptly Myrtle paused, with sudden alarm.

“There he is again!”

“There who is again? Are you seeing things a’ready?”

“Look!—that man waiting by the lamp-post! He’s been there the last three nights and he’s spoken to me every time.”

A quiver of nausea at this old, inevitable phase of city life went through Miss Mooney. “Have you spoken to him?”

“No; I’ve been too scared. But he walks alongside and tells me how pretty I am. Last night he said I was too pretty to be out so late by myself. And he says he could tell I’d been workin’ too hard. And he says I was too pretty to work.”

“Don’t slip your trolley, Moitle. Remember, it was pretty dark when he seen you. We all look good in the

After Dark

gloaming. You may be pretty—it's a matter of taste; but I ain't seen no managers on your door-step beggin' you to understudy Lillian or Maxine. What did you say to the dawg?"

"I was too scared to say anything to him, I tell you."

"Ah, whyn't you hand him a brick in the jor?"

"Well, you see, he was awful polite and—you can't hit a man for tellin' you you're pretty, can you?"

"That depends on the time, the place and the goil—and the nasty way he says it. I've even had 'em callin' me a queen. It was some darker than this. But you let me talk to this jepman. Come along!"

She dragged the terrified, yet not altogether bored, young woman forward. The shadowy saunterer hesitated at the

sight of the twain, but ventured to follow and at length to come alongside with an ingratiating :

“ Good-evening, ladies ! ”

Miss Mooney whirled on him, whipped a hatpin from her hair and exclaimed, with militant if not elegant dignity :

“ You speak to us again, and I’ll lose this hatpin in you. Us goils is ladies, and I warn you to keep off our street. Foithermore, I know just who you are and I’m going to put your wife wise to you, you —— ”

But he had dissolved from view. Myrtle stared at the vacuous dark and gasped :

“ How did you come to know him ? ”

“ I never sor him before. ”

“ Then how’d you know he had a wife ? ”



"You speak to us again, and I'll lose this hat pin in you!"

After Dark

“ I just took a chance.”

Myrtle shook her head in envy of Miss Mooney's great intellect, and walked on. At the front door she sighed :

“ The streets are awful dangerous, ain't they ? ”

Miss Mooney sniffed. “ They're no more dangerous than a droring-room—for a goil that's got a hatpin and a wad of gumption. The question always is, Are you sincere ? You know the toon—Are you sincere ? ”

IX

DUBS AND DUDS

AND the morrow was another day; another day of goaded muscles and harrowed spirits. Again it was nearly midnight when the footsore, heartsore, back-sore, nerve-sore women slumped down the street. This time they were unaccosted. Both were a trifle disappointed. Lisette needed a little adventure as a stimulant to her fagged spirits; Myrtle needed a little flattery after listening all day to nagging complaints and rebukes.

They made the first flight of stairs with labour. Half-way up the second, Myrtle sank on the step to rest and to complain in a low murmur:

“ I don’t know how I can keep my place any longer.”

“ What’s biting you now ? ” was Lisette’s query.

“ My shoes are all wore out and my best dress is a bunch of rags. Most of the other girls dress so fine, I’m ashamed to show my face there.”

“ Well, some of them hot dressers have a right to be ashamed to show their faces anywhere. Remember what Laura Jean says: ‘ Rags is royal raimunt when wore for voitue’s sake ! ’ ”

“ I know, but—well, I asked one of the girls, Madeleine McCann, how she managed to wear such swell things on four a week, and she just laughed.”

“ Madeleine’s got a noive to laugh at that.”

“ She said they was give to her by an awful nice gentleman friend ; and she

said I was so pretty I could get an ottamobile if I only had friends. Do you believe that?"

"I believe her so much I'll break her face if she don't leave you alone!" Miss Mooney flared, then ruminated: "Oh, yes, Moitle, a goil with half a face and no self-respeck can wear di'monds and oimine cloaks if she don't care how she oins 'em.

"I guess you've come to the cross-town line, Moitle. Every goil reaches it that don't die young and good. You can stay on the straight line or take a transfer. It's up to you. And now you're right where you gotta stay on or get off. You gotta make up your mind which you want most—a lot of glad rags or a speckled repitation.

"Us woikin' goils is up against it, Moitle. We're only hack-horses unless

Dubs and Duds

we get into the merry-go-round and look like spotted ponies. There's a lot of music and hoorah goes with the merry-go-round, but don't forget the ponies belongs to the public; they're right on view for anybody that comes along with the price.

"Coney Island is a nice place to go for a while and look at; but the poor dubs that's in the show—well, they got about as much fun as us folks that's doin' the real woik in this Christmus celebration.

"Make up your mind, Moitle. It's blamed hard either way; but I guess in the long run the goil that does her shop-woik on the streets ain't got anything on the goil that slaves in the stores. We don't pull down much coin and it comes hard—but it's clean, Moitle; it's awful nice and clean.

"Some day a husband may come along—a decent, hard-woikin' guy. You ain't goin' to bring him anything except yourself. But if you can say to him, 'I ain't got no dowry, but I'm decent,' I guess that'll make him prouder than if you brung him a bucket of rubies and poils—and he was afraid to ask you where you got 'em—for fear you'd tell him. Think it over, Moitle. Your time has came."

And then the girls resumed their long climb in the dark. Another flight and Myrtle paused once more, to groan and to wail :

"O' course, you're right, Lisette ; but it's a nawful humiliation to go through life woikin' like an ox and dressin' like a cow."

"That's no news to me," said Lisette.
"But sometimes dubby duds is less

humiliatin' than being too much à la mud."

She waited at her door till Myrtle went on up to her own, for Myrtle was afraid of the dark. But Lisette was more afraid for her.

She had seen a pitiful procession of girls whose feet grew tired of the narrow path behind the counter, whose hands grew tired of selling pretty things to other women, whose hearts grew sick of enduring insult for a pittance, and who wandered just outside where flattery waited and jewelry and love, or at least its tinsel imitation. And she knew that Myrtle was of the type that tempts the tempter, and is fain to drift.

X

FAG AND FRET

EVERY morning the Mammoth Shop opened with a blare and the bombardment kept up till night. And after the close there were further hours of bitter moil. The racking everlastingness of it was wearing the hearts of the store-crew raw. The irritated shoppers found them irritable and wondered why.

Miss Mooney caught glimpses of Mr. Sterling surrounded by frantic women and answering their rain of questions as a man bats at a swarm of wasps. Miss Mooney yearned over him from afar and felt woefully sorry for him ; longed to tell him how handsome he

was, how patient, how alert, how automatically polite.

She mourned the deferred opportunity to make him know her sympathy, her helpfulness. Those evenings that were to have been devoted to wooing him were devoted now to wrestling with the débris of a day's battle and aligning and condensing the stock for the next morning's onsets.

"Oh, if I only had one evening off!" was the constant cry of Miss Mooney's love-lorn, shop-worn soul.

Mr. Sterling never walked home with her now. He left before she did. He seemed to have forgotten her. Myrtle Crilley was always telling Lisette how "consid'rut" Mr. Sterling was; but of Miss Mooney Mr. Sterling was markedly oblivious. She tried to flatter herself that he was concealing his love

from the prying eyes of strangers. A duke would have done that. But the theory was not quite satisfactory. And she had a heartache every time he gave her a curt order. He called her "318" now—always.

One evening, after the shop was closed, the wilted Myrtle was stretching upward to push a bolt of goods on a high shelf when she reached the exact limit of her energies,—simply ceased to be alive and swooned to the floor, striking against the counter as she fell. Miss Mooney from a distance saw her go and went tearing through the crowd that formed. She went with rough shoves and harsh commands :

"Lea' me pass ! Get out the way ! Give her air ! Here, lemme take her. Put that bolt of silk under her feet. Go on, I say ! Whatta I care if it is

===== *Fag and Fret* =====

silk? Bring me some water, you idiots!"

Swiftly she opened the girl's waist at the throat and would have had her corset loosened if Myrtle had not come back to life with a sick and weary reluctance.

By now Mr. Sterling was bending over the two girls. He had seen numberless women faint; sometimes they were only overworked, underfed shop-girls. He was brave at swoons. But now he was white and his lips trembled. He lifted the pretty bundle in his arms and spoke to her soothingly.

Miss Mooney felt a strange alarm, but she forgot herself at once and raged:

"She'd otta go home and lay down. Somebody's got a right to take her home."

She asked if she might be excused,

but the floor-manager needed her. He offered to send one of the little girls in the gathering department. Mr. Sterling came to the rescue.

"I'll take her home myself."

"That's a grand idea, Poicival," Miss Mooney whispered. But he did not hear. He was sending one girl for Myrtle's hat and coat and another to order a taxi-cab.

A taxi-cab! A floor-walker taking a saleslady home in a taxi-cab! It was "unhoid" of, and romantic—and gee, how swell!

Miss Mooney went back to her work. She had never found the boxes so heavy, the shelves so high. Everything she strained for was just out of her reach.

She went home alone, grimly, doggedly. She intended to climb on up

to see how Myrtle was, but when she reached her own floor she found her mother in despair over the condition of Claryce.

Claryce had been working for fifteen hours a day for three days, eternally wrapping chocolate creams in tin-foil. The monotony of it had driven her into hysteria. She was making such a racket with her sobs and laughs that Lisette had to calm her by threatening to beat her if she went to the candy store the next day.

"But I'll lose the day's pay," the girl blubbered; "and I was goin' to get a present for George with it."

"I'll make up the loss out of me own pocket; but if any member of this family gives anybody a Christmus present I'll commit moider."

An hour after midnight father Den-

nis Mooney came in. He had left the stable at seven-thirty in the morning and had driven his express wagon till midnight in an icy wind. Then the horses had to be driven to the stable and bedded down. Then he had to walk home. His legs and arms were so benumbed that he felt himself growing old and he was in mortal dread that sickness or accident might disable him. The express company, instead of paying overtime, made each employee a gift of ten dollars for doing the seven labours of Hercules in seven days to oblige the impatient Christmas spirit. Presents must be on time at whatever cost.

Dennis Mooney had already provided a place for that ten dollars. It meant more to him than any amount of rest, warmth, comfort. The weather threat-

===== *Fag and Fret* =====

ened a blizzard, but that would make no difference in his necessities and his children's necessities. He could afford better to die December 26th than to fall sick December 22d.

The Crilley family had troubles of its own too. Father Crilley, working in the Mammoth, had managed to crush three of his right fingers under a falling packing case; and Mother Crilley's rheumatism was that bad in her she had been unable to get through the store-scrubbin' at all at all that night. One day's pay gone was a calamity; to lose two would be a cataclysm.

In the face of this situation Myrtle had not the courage to spare herself. She tottered into the Mammoth the next day only an hour late; but even Mr. Sterling could not get her fine remitted.

Lisette's vague jealousy of her vanished at the sight of Myrtle's face. She felt spurred even to a compliment:

"You're lookin' awful well, Moitle."

"Lookin' well! I'm dying."

"I know you are, but it's becomin' to you. You got one of them faces that sufferin' improves. You look so kind of wistful it makes everybody feel like pettin' you. When I'm wore out and sick I get so dog-on green and stringy everybody thinks I got the epizootic and starts to run."

Myrtle was deeply interested in her own woe. She described her sensations as she fainted, how appalling they were; and how doleful the family condition when she reached home in Mr. Sterling's cab.

"That cab must have set him back

about four dollars," sighed Miss Mooney.

"It was \$3.80. I read it on the cash-register those taxi-cabs has in front. But he didn't make any fuss about it. He's a gentleman if ever there was one—and so consid'rut. He said I mustn't work any more this week. When I told him I just had to he offered to lend me what I would 'a' earned—and more. But I wouldn't take it. I remembered what you told me."

Miss Mooney's feelings were mixed. Myrtle went on :

"Paw and maw are both so stove up they've got to lay off a day, but Alice and Maude can work nights now; so they get somep'n for overtime."

Alice was fourteen, and an affidavit stated that twelve-year-old Maude was fourteen; so that both had been per-

mitted to work, by night as well as by day. For a kind provision of the New York child-labour law fortunately suspends the edict against night work from December 18th to December 24th and the inspectors are graciously careless during this glad week. Otherwise the younger children of the poor would be denied participation in the Christmas privileges of night work and overtime ; and those who forget to shop till the last few days might find their gifts delayed in transit.

XI

TO THE RESCUE

THE Crilley family suffered another disaster that afternoon. Alice, the cash-girl, who was fourteen years old and should have known better, had had so few play-things in her lifetime and was so dazzled by the fairy-land paradise of the store that, after carrying several hundred beautiful dolls from one counter in the toy department to the wrapping-counter and back, she thrilled with such a spasm of longing to call one of the exquisite creatures her own that she lost the discretion one demands of a woman of her years.

She made a desperate resolution to kidnap one maddeningly attractive doll, sneak it home and adopt it. But the purchaser had given a two-dollar bill for her to change. Wondering how to dispose of all this wealth, Alice decided to take that home, too, as a consolation to her mother for being unable to scrub half the night.

As she was making her way to the cloak-room, with the intention of concealing the doll in her ragged coat, one of the store-detectives nabbed her and demanded an explanation in so gruff a tone that guilt and terror combined with grief at the loss of the doll to throw the child into convulsions of despair.

To avoid alarming and exciting the already insanely excited shoppers, Mr. Finn, the detective, dragged the sobbing

===== *To the Rescue* =====

culprit out of sight and hearing into a corridor.

Miss Mooney happened to be passing through on her way to a four-o'clock luncheon. She paused, learned the history of the crime and asked Mr. Finn what he was going to do about it.

"Turn the little sneak-thief over to the cops, of course. She ought to go to the reform school. I got her red-handed."

Miss Mooney lost her temper with facility: "Red-handed!—that little white rag! Reform school?—why, she's only a doll herself! Do you rully think I'm goin' to let you toin that kid over to the cops for swipin' a dollar doll that cost the store about thoity-nine cents? Not if I see you foist, Mr. Finn."

"Wh-what else can I do, Miss

Mooney?" the terrified official exclaimed.

"Send her back and say nothin', you big lunkhead. I'll pay for this doll m'self and get another one just like it for the dame that's waitin' for this. She won't do it again—will you, Alice? O' course you won't. If you do I'll spank the life out of you. Now go on up to the cloak-room and leave this; and gimme that two-dollar bill. Then come down and get busy and forget it. As for you, Jim Finn, take your big feet back in that crowd and try and ketch some of them slick shoplifters that's been walkin' off with sealskin muffs and real lace doilies, instead of scarin' babies to death. You overgrown cradle-snatcher!"

The frightened child went sniffing to the cloak-room with her booty, and

it was the detective who wore the guilty look as he sneaked back into the crowd.

The whole transaction was hideously immoral and an odious blot on Miss Mooney's record of perfect fidelity to the store, above all things ; but perhaps the Recording Angel was sufficiently confused to set it down in the wrong column—to her credit instead of to her expense.

Miss Mooney said nothing of this to Myrtle, not even when she saw Mr. Sterling hanging about after store-closing time, waiting to escort Miss Crilley home—this time by the street car, the taxi-cab of the poor.

Lisette was kept half an hour later. When at last she entered the little entrance-hall of the flat-building, and set her key to the lock of the inside door,

Mr. Sterling was just finishing his farewell to Myrtle. He tossed Miss Mooney a staccato " Good-night," as he hurried away.

Lisette did not help Myrtle up the stairs that night. Myrtle did not need help.

XII

MERRY XMAS !

WHEN Miss Mooney's fiendish alarm-clock exploded its clamour at six o'clock on the morning of the day before Christmas the room was still dark. After the five hours of sleep Lisette had had, she felt that the room ought to be dark.

She tore her protesting frame from the bed, groped to her wash-stand and beat her hot eyes with a cold wet rag till she had shocked them open. She peered past the window-shade.

Down the dark airshaft huge snow-flakes were fluttering grayly, ominously.

Lisette began to pummel her sister awake.

“Goitrood! Goitrood! Get up!
Didn’t you hear the alarm?”

Rousing Gertrude of a morning was always a miracle: it was recalling life to the dead. This morning Gertrude was deader than ever. The box factory had required overtime too, to supply an unexpected demand. But eventually she was up, if not awake. Claryce was harder still to galvanize. She had worked till three o’clock that morning packing nauseating sweets into the gift-boxes Gertrude’s factory was showering forth.

Lisette essayed a mockery of cheer:

“The people that have been hopin’
for a white Christmas get their wish.”

“Poor paw!” sighed Gertrude.

“Poor all of us!” sighed Claryce.

The necessity of making haste with
the breakfast stimulated all the

===== *Merry Xmas!* =====

Mooneys to an artificial vitality. The father dashed off to his stable, the mother ran to her sewing machine to finish an eleventh-hour job that had been dumped on her. The two boys fled to their posts and the three girls skated to the street cars, for the pavements were covered with ice and the thickening snow was disguising the trickiest spots.

The girls would have made a lark of it if their hearts had not been squeezed so dry of cheer; if their feet had not been squeezed so full of pain. The street cars were tumbrels of wretched, exhausted, early-morning martyrs, wild-eyed for sleep. The girls were lucky to get aboard at all, happy to find straps to hang to.

Wind and sleet came later in the morning. Lisette, smothered with the

overheated, overbreathed air and the stifling atmosphere of packed and jammed humanity, envied the delivery drivers and wondered if she could ever endure to the end of the ordeal. On this blessed occasion the store kept open till ten o'clock in the evening, so that the most unlucky, the most procrastinant lover of his friends and family could dash in to buy the neglected gifts, at whatever cost of privation and pain to the prisoners behind the counters.

Miss Mooney had lived through five Christmases and she supposed that she would live through this one—perhaps an indefinite number more. But to-day her heart was dead in her. The little encounter in the entrance hall; the haunting fact that Mr. Sterling had taken Myrtle home—Myrtle, for whose

===== *Merry Xmas !* =====

advantage Lisette had unwittingly cooked Mr. Sterling's Thanksgiving dinner; the dreadful fact that Mr. Sterling had lingered for half an hour to say his "Good-nights" to Myrtle and had not lingered half a minute to say "Good-night" to herself—these things she thought of instead of the things she was selling.

Therefore she made mistakes, quoted wrong prices, added figures up wrong, gave the wrong parcels to people, the wrong change to others. The shoppers were furious with her. The frenzy of the last chance to shop, the indignation at finding the best things gone, the enormous fatigue of the ambulant population of the store almost rivalling the fatigue of the stationary populace, the incredible denseness of the crowds and their immobility—all these and

other factors in the annual Christmas Waterloo made the shoppers peevish to the edge of hysteria.

They bullied, harried, criticized all the salespeople. Even Miss Mooney they bullied. And she made no fitting replies. There was no fight in her.

Some of the girls were talking about her in the lunch-room when she dragged her listless feet thither at half-past four for her first nibble or sip since breakfast. One of her elbow neighbours was saying :

“ Lisette’s come-backs at them dames useta be as good as a show. No matter how swell the party might be, Lisette would pass it right across the counter to her. But to-day she ain’t laid out a one of ’em. Low-brows have walked all over her. I bet she’s sick. I bet she’s goin’ to die ! ”

===== *Merry Xmas!* =====

“Who’s goin’ to die?” said Lisette herself. They turned in horror, but she had heard only the last few words. She repeated: “Who’s goin’ to die—Moitle?”

“Naw; Myrt’s as chipper as a canary to-day,” said Constance, the change-angel. “But what ails you, Lisette? You look awful chalky round the gills. You ain’t sick?”

“Me sick! Where’d I get time to get sick?” said Miss Mooney. Then she made an effort at her old spunk; but she was so tired she fell back on used material: “I’m just broken-hearted that to-morra’s a holiday and the store won’t be open. I just hate to lay abed late in the morning!”

There was a volley of protests: “Oh, slush!”—“Oh, hush!”—“Don’t talk about sleep or I’ll begin to snore

right here!"—"It'll take a month of Sundays to set me right."

As weary arms lifted burdensome spoons or leaden cups, and weary jaws munched slowly at tasteless food, the girls fell to exchanging experiences of their ante-Christmas endeavour, bragging about their misfortunes.

Two of them, whose task was the careful packing of cut glass, had worked from 8 A. M. to 11 P. M. the day before without sitting down, except to two hasty meals. A member of the photograph-developing staff had worked till midnight every night for a week and till three o'clock the morning before, finishing orders for those who gave their own pictures as gifts. A heavy-eyed woman from the packing rooms had worked for the last four days from 8:30 A. M. till 1 A. M.

===== *Merry Xmas!* =====

A spectacled damsel from the audit department claimed the palm : since December 7th she had been kept over the accounts from 8:30 A. M. till nearly midnight ; she lived in Fordham and she had almost half a mile to walk along a country road when she reached home at night or left it extra early in the morning.

Listening to these victims of the blissful holiday spirit, Lisette felt that she had had an easy week of it. Her bitter heart turned against herself for thinking that she was unlucky. Now she lacked even the support of self-pity.

Just one throb of it came to her at nine o'clock that night, when she made a Lisettian retort to a shopper who complained of her to a floor-walker—to Mr. Sterling of all. The woman came

back with him in tow. For the greater glory of the Mammoth he felt called upon to uphold the sacred rights of the customer.

“Miss 318,” he called sharply. “This lady says that you ——”

“Yes; that’s so. I’m sorry. I apologize,” said Lisette, and the listening girls, who knew her of old, almost fainted with amazement. A week ago Lisette would have floored the floor-walker and the customer too, but to-night she did not wait to be accused. She confessed before she heard the charge.

“Don’t let it happen again!” said Mr. Sterling in a tone of cold steel; then, with quick reversion to his most floor-walkerly unction, he purred to the triumphant customer: “Do you accept her apology, madam?”

===== *Merry Xmas !* =====

The offended shopper completed Lisette's effacement.

"Oh, I guess so; but it's shameful—the impudence of these creatures! I don't know what makes them so discourteous. Well, I suppose it's because they're only shop-girls after all."

Then she swept out, hastening to the Christmas tree she was dressing for her dear family and a few friends.

Constance gaped incredulously from her crow's-nest.

"Lisette, you let her get away with it! What's the matter of you?"

But Lisette did not hear. She was crying. Her tears were exposing the pretenses of a guaranteed washable fabric, but what did she care? Her gentleman friend had gave her a call-down before everybody!

She shed only a few tears, but a few

were many for Lisette. In a moment she lifted her head and began answering questions, tapping her pencil and calling :

“Cash ! Cash !”

The girl who answered next was Alice Crilley, wavering on her spindle legs. When she came back with the change she motioned Lisette to bend down while she whispered :

“Merry Christmus, Miss Mooney ! I love you !”

The Crilleys were grateful at least, very grateful, as the outcome showed.

An effort to shut up shop was made at ten, but the incoming crowds prevented. At eleven the doors were forcibly put together in the face of a number of indignant persons who were outraged at the laziness and selfishness of the employees.

===== *Merry Xmas!* =====

An hour more and the crowds that had been closed inside had been waited on and had straggled out piecemeal.

The day's work was now finished save for a matter of two hours' labour clearing up the Augean disorder and arranging the display of the great White Sale, with which shop-weary woman-kind would be decoyed back into the store the day after Christmas.

XIII

HER HOLIDAY

CHRISTMAS morning was two hours old when Lisette's work was done and permission was given her to set out for One Hundred and Forty-seventh Street. She was so tired and lonely that she looked about for Myrtle. She was reduced to the estate of wishing to lean on Myrtle.

She made inquiries in Myrtle's department. A sick-eyed girl, in the last stages of collapse, moaned :

"Myrtle Crilley, you mean? Oh, I think she resigned and went home at six o'clock. I guess the work was kind of hard for her. Her mother's downstairs. You can ask her."

Miss Mooney slouched to an elevator.

===== *Her Holiday* =====

The boy was asleep standing up. She took to the stairs. In the basement she found little Jimmie Crilley *hors de combat*. He had been filling the big wheeled bins with packages for the delivery wagons since early morning. The last truck had set out at eleven and Jimmie had fallen asleep in one of the bins.

Eleven-year-old Maude was one of several shrivelled little "gatherers" darting about picking up waste-paper, torn boxes, bits of string and like clutter.

"Me woik's almost finished, Miss Mooney," she said.

"And I guess you are too. Where's your maw?"

"Oh, she's scrubbin' round here somewheres. Oh, there goes her feet just crawlin' behind that counter."

Miss Mooney followed the crouching old woman and asked if she might go home with her.

Mrs. Crilley sat up on her heels with a yowl of rheumatic agony, then twisted a sleepy smile :

“The Lord love ye, Miss Lizzie! I’m here these next two hours yet.”

“I guess this is where I beat it for home all by my lonesome.”

“If it would be anny coompany to you—and you’d be doin’ me a favour at that—you might trundle them two childer home wit’ you. It’s gittin’ kind of late for the cr’atures.”

“I’d be tickled to death ; of course I I will.”

Mrs. Crilley beamed up at her :
“I’m thinkin’ you’re always glad to be doin’ good to people, Miss Lizzie. And it’s little I know where us Cril-

Her Holiday

leys would be this blessed Christmus if you hadn't come our way, God love ye!"

Miss Mooney was so unused to praise of this sort—or of any sort—that her cheeks were amazed to find themselves blushing. She darted away from the confusion of gratitude, woke the Crilley boy, bundled up the Crilley girl and set out for home with them.

The streets were hushed a little with snow and the shopping district was as quiet as a last year's battle-field. They passed a dark and lonesome church. Some hours ago it had been all alight and harmonious with carols. It was deserted now. Street cars were infrequent and their passengers were mostly drugged with fatigue. A few who had found the leisure to get drunk were regarded with envy.

The residences along the car line were generally dark and still. Hours before, they had been hilarious with holiday cheer, with gleaming pine trees and with the exchange of gifts that Miss Mooney and her sort had displayed and sold and delivered. But these houses were dark now.

Down many a side street great trucks were still pounding, the tormented horses slipping and scrambling, the overdriven drivers fiendish with hurry and merciless, as they had received no mercy. Small boys were helping the drivers, shivering on the snowy seats and at every stop dropping to the ground, lugging bundles up stoops and waiting for some one to answer the bell. Flocks of messenger boys in uniform were still busy about the town, carrying telegrams of good

Her Holiday

will and parcels of all shapes and sizes.

It seemed an age before the car reached Miss Mooney's street. On either side of her the Crilley children slept. Sleep was pleading with her too, but she was afraid of being carried past her destination and she agonized against the stupor.

At last the car approached her district. She wakened the complaining, stumbling, half-clothed waifs and, with an arm about each, helped them out into the snow and along the slippery pavement. So they reached home, their day's work done—the shop-girl flanked by the bin-boy and the gatherer.

Lisette lugged the children up the stairs somehow. Their father met them at the door.

“Make no n’ise,” he cautioned them in a whisper. “Your poor sister Myrtle is sleepin’. Thank ye very kindly, Miss Mooney, for ahl ye’ve done for us. I’d give ye me right hand, but I hurted it and lost two days’ pay. But here’s me left hand. It’s n’arest the heart; and so the Lord love ye and give ye a Merry Christmas and manny of them!”

“Thank you, Mr. Crilley. The same to you. Good-night.” She tottered for the stairs, whispering to herself: “A Merry Christmas!—oh, yes! Many of them—no, thanks!”

She was halted by a shrill whisper. She turned to see Myrtle Crilley at the door, beckoning to her. Even to Miss Mooney, at that time, in that mood, the girl was pretty, standing there in her nightgown, with her long hair free.



So they went home—the shop-girl flanked by the bin-boy
and the gatherer.

Her Holiday

She was trembling with the cold and with her new rapture.

"I heard you whispering. I wasn't asleep yet. I'm too happy to sleep. I've just got to tell you, Lisette, for I owe it all to you."

"What you talkin' about, Moitle?" said Miss Mooney, who had a dreadful knowledge of what was coming. The girl seized her and murmured :

"Mr. Sterling made me leave the store. He said I was too ——"

"Yes ; I know you are. Go on."

"Well, we're going to be married. He's got a day off, you know ; and he's just crazy about me, and I think he's the grandest man on earth. And we'll be so happy. But I owe it all to you, Lisette. If you hadn't invited him to that Thanksgiving dinner and sent for me we'd never met. It was awful

generous and consid'rut of you, Lisette. You're the best-hearted ——"

"Kinely omit flowers!" snapped Miss Mooney, who could never do anything gracefully. "I hope you'll be turrible happy. Good-night!"

"Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Mr. Sterling and I have bought you a lovely Christmas present. I'll give it to you later. Good-night, dearie!"

"A Christmas present!—the noive of them!" said Miss Mooney aloud, though she was alone—very much alone.

She limped down the creaking stairway on feet that seemed to creak. She tiptoed into her own flat, fearing to wake the sleepers, whom Gabriel himself would have had to blow at twice. She wavered as she stood up to peel off



"I have just got to tell you, Lisette, for I owe it all to you."

===== *Her Holiday* =====

her clothes ; and as she stretched herself out in bed she was too tired to be lonely, or to regret anything, or to wish for anything but what was about to be hers. Her prayer was brief—one whole-souled sigh :

“ Thank God for the takin’ off of shoes ! Thank God for sleep ! ”

XIV

THE WHITE SALE

THE day after Christmas the Mammoth Shop was again crowded and rumorous as a huge beehive. There was missing the frenzy of Christmas shopping. Things had settled down to their normal routine.

The White Sale was on. In the less-advertised aisles a few women idled about, examining things in a leisurely way. Miss Madeleine McCann was showing a new diamond ring to the other salesladies, who expressed their own ideals by their envy or by their scorn. Around the counters where the day's prime bargains were exposed

there were fierce struggles, but their ferocity lacked the fanatic element of altruism that had embittered the holiday war. Mr. Percival Sterling moved here and there, gracious as of yore, but with a certain aloofness, a certain added dignity.

In one of the bargain kiosks a tired-looking woman with hair of a sulphurous tint was rebuking the impertinences of the jostlers about her. At a slight distance one could hear little but ——

“What’s that? Yes, m’m! No, m’m! The price is plainly marked. What’s that? Yes, m’m. No, m’m.”

Two women, beautifully dressed, dawdling about with no more intent to purchase than if they had been in the Metropolitan Art Gallery, retreated in dismay from her environs.

“What’s the matter with that creature?” said one. “She’s a regular snapping-turtle.”

“Oh, that’s 318,” said the other. “She’s always that way. I don’t know why they keep her.”

In the rotunda a number of men on long ladders were removing in sections a colossal statue of papier-mâché. The iconoclasts were handling it with careless irreverence. From what remained it had evidently been a hollow image of Santa Claus.

THE END

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